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->From the Editor's Keyboard   "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, by now most everyone's New Years hangovers or indigestion attacks are
over. We spent a nice quiet evening at home, as usual. A few drinks as a
token celebration, listened to some music, and watched "the ball" drop in
Times Square. And then back to work after a long weekend!

It's been a long week. The weather is finally wintery. We got pelted with
two storms in the last couple of days. I was planning some reminiscing this
week, but I'm worn out from the snow clean-up. What a start to the new
year! So, let's get to this week's issue; I'll relax the weary bones, and
plan better for next week.

Until next time...

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                        PEOPLE ARE TALKING
                       compiled by Joe Mirando
                         joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I'm sorry that I missed you last week. I
really hate missing columns, but I had a couple of things hit at once,
and it kind of knocked me off guard. These damned stomach viruses
(virii, actually) seem to be getting more and more annoying. I don't
seem to be shaking them off like I used to. Maybe I'm just getting old.
Naaaah. <grin>

Anyway, between neck pain and the stomach bug, I was really not feeling
well. I'm much better now though, and I used some of the time that I
wasn't holding either my neck or my stomach to think about the new year.
I hope that Oh-Five brings all of us some of that health, wealth and
prosperity that people are always talking about.

I find it a little bit hard to believe that it's 2005 already. I mean, it
seems like only yesterday that we were all hearing about the Y2K bug
that was going to ruin our lives forever.... and hearing about it... and
hearing about it.

The Y2K bug turned out to be a minor annoyance at most, but there was a
lot of money spent to make sure that that's all it was. I don't remember
the figures now, but it was a lot.

What amazed me at the time... and still does now... is that after the
'crisis' passed, the same people who were so frantic and certain that
the Y2K bug was going cause the end of civilization as we know then
started to cry 'foul' and wonder if it was all a grand scheme to part us
from our hard earned dollars.

I mean, c'mon folks. the reason that Y2K WASN'T a catastrophe was that we
spent all that money to fix it before it bit us on our pink, fleshy
butts. But some people (politicians, mostly) figure that the fact that
something bad DIDN'T happen must mean that it COULDN'T have happened.

Being computer-folk, we know better. But computers are pretty much still
mysticism and hocus-pocus voodoo to a lot of folks. They seem to think
that, just because they don't grasp what's going on, there's really
NOTHING going on.

The lengths that people will go to to prove their foolishness simply
amazes me.

Well, enough of that. Let's get to the news and stuff from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Joseph Place posts this about using the THING desktop on his CT60:

"I thought I would post this in case someone else has the same problem
or a better solution. I found that after registering the THING
desktop I could not load it at startup without a 68000 exception -69
in MagiC. I have had to put cacheoff.prg in my auto folder, and
restart the cache after booting. Since my Falcon is on most of the
time, this is not a big problem. It is strange that THING worked
fine before entering the registration code. Must be some feature
that is implemented after registration."

Thomas Binder asks Joseph:

"Which version of MagiC is that? I remember having had the same
problem on the Milan (using an MC68040), and it was actually
caused by a bug in MagiC's Pexec()-code (which is used to load the
module containing the functions not available in the unregistered
version).

It works fine on my CT60-Falcon, but I don't know what version of
MagiC I use and can't currently check. It's even possible that I
implemented a workaround for the problem in the beta version of
Thing, but as the original appearance of the problem is more than
four years ago, I can't tell without first checking the source."

Joseph tells Thomas:

"I have MagiC 6.01. Thanks!"

Lonny Pursell adds his thoughts:

"I can't ever recall having Thing crash even once all the years I've run
it on my Hades 060 and I force all the caches on before Thing loads.
There is a patch dir in the ct60 archive for magic which I assume is
required. But I also do not use magic."

Brian Roland asks about using a flash writer in his Stacy:

"The tiny hard drive in my STacy is toast...2nd one to go in a year's
time. It's getting hard to find drives that work at all in the
thing...let alone that sync up and boot properly. I've found more
modern ones that 'work' but can only access a small portion of the
capacity, and they're power hungry 7200RPM things that I fear draw way
more power from the STacy's power supply than it's really happy to
deliver.

So....
Does anyone know where I might find an internal Flash Card
reader/writer that might work in the thing? I've scoured the net
looking for SCSI based FLASH readers/writers...eBay as well, and have
turned up nothing."

Shortly thereafter, Brian posts:

"Looks like I may have found one.... We shall see...

I've found a SCSI based card reader to try out with my Atari machines.
Ultimately I hope to get it working in a STacy.

The first question is what sort of flash card would be best?
Do I need an ATA card, or will the linear type work?

The reader/writer is a Microtech brand with PCMCIA, SmartCard and
Compact slots all in the same internal 3.5 device. I don't have a
model number...but from what I gather Microtech only made a hand full
of these things, and they do the standard SCSI command set."

Uwe Seimet asks Brian:

"Have you tried whether it works with the current demo version of
HDDRIVER? (http://www.seimet.de/hddriver_english.html) If the adapter
implements the standard SCSI command set there shouldn't be any
problems."

Brian replies to Uwe:

"Haven't tried the unit yet...it was in an auction, and the price was
right, so I just ordered it. The seller says the unit should work fine
with any standard SCSI card. It's 50 pin narrow...I'm guessing it's
most likely a SCSI II class device. I'll know more when it gets here
 :)

Yes, I'll most likely be using HD Driver. I run version 7.06 on the
CT2b Falcon, and 8.03 on the Mega. Currently the STacy had the old ICD
type partitions goin' on, for the sake of the Mac Emulator that was set
up ages ago and running some variant of the Supra disk drivers. I
have all that backed up to zip disks...but I'm tired of replacing hard
to find drives in this STacy with yet another worn out drive. If I do
end up running HD Driver on a third machine, would I need to register a
third license? Not sure your policy on that.

The big hope here, is to get the thing working in the STacy, with its
stock SCSI controller. I know it'll be tricky...some concerns include
this....

That host is designed to only look at one device on ID 0. It doesn't
have a parity generator (tho' one can be added by hacking in a 30cent
chip). The host doesn't comply with the true SCSI termination
standards. I've read that with a hacked up cable you can fool the host
into running two drives both set to ID 0. So In a nut shell, even if I
can get the flash reader/writer to work with the host...I'll only be
able to see one of the slots, and it's anyone's guess which slot it
will be. If lucky...the flash reader will be highly configurable with
jumpers and what not and I can pick one slot and disable the rest.

If this don't work...guess I'll have to hunt down another aged out
overpriced SCSI I drive :/ True, there's a few more modern drives that
can be 'choked down' and used in the thing...but they tend to be power
hungry 7200RPM jobs 2gig and above, and they usually don't spin up in
time to boot the STacy on power-up (gotta do the coldboot in
auto-folder trick, or warmboot from cold GEM after spin-up).
The STacy power supply wasn't designed to deliver that kind of
power...I've tried it, and while it works...I'm not cozy with how HOT
the internal power supply gets.

I'm open to ideas...in the mean time...we'll wait, and find out when
the device gets here :)   I'm also keeping an eye out for a single slot
SCSI based flash reader in an internal version...that has a better shot
of working in the STacy."

Henk Robbers tells Brian:

"Very interesting stuff. Keep feeding us with all the juicy details!"

Henk adds:

"Well, I would love to have a solid state hard disc on my TT.
One step forward to a completely silent TT.
I only need 512 Mb, could even do with only 256.

Just wondering... It should behave like a hard disc, shouldn't it?
The SCSI stuff would take care of the internals.

If HD-driver recognizes it as "direct access", it can just partition it
anyway you like, I would say.

If you can find more than 1, buy one for me."

Lonny Pursell adds his experiences:

"I have booted my Hades from a Microtech dual PCMCIA model. Didn't leave it that way, just did it for a test one day when I was installing it.

Mine are PCMCIA ATA far as I can tell, Sandisk brand. Same rules apply to the size of the card as if it was a HD. If you would get a 1gb card you would have to partition it however your TOS/OS/setup of choice allows. You can get 128mb cards pretty cheap.

I have several of the dual PCMCIA readers, all the same model. Works like a charm. Bought one of those triple slot ones from Microtech once, could not get it work for nothing. Dealer said it was fine after I sent it back, so I don't know what the deal was with it. Maybe it didn't like the Hades scsi bus? Good luck with it. If I recall it will use 3 scsi ID's.

In theory is should it work though. I was rather disappointed when it didn't but with adapters I still use compact flash and smart media. One is on my TT as well."

Mike Stepansky asks:

"Is it possible to play Atari ST games on PDA (Tungsten C) or Pocket PC (Dell x50v) device?

The cool thing I came across was a SD card with Atari 2600 (classic) for Pocket PC x50, which you can hook up to a "Video" (hence a "v" in Video for X50v).

I wonder....gotta be BIGGER than what Atari Lynx can do in a small limit size rom."

Greg Goodwin tells Mike:

"There is a program called CASTCE that runs on the iPAQ pocket PC (and possibly others). Some have found it useful, but I get enough lockups to make games of any length frustrating. Your mileage may vary. A review is available here: http://www.myatari.net/issues/apr2003/castce.htm .

I'd be interested in knowing if you get it to work reliably."

David Wade tells Greg and Mike:

"It seems to run the limited selection of games I tried on it (Buggy Boy, LLamatron)but it does seem temperamental."

Well folks, that's it for this week. It's hard to believe that we're beginning our seventh year of A-ONE. Let's see what's out there. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
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              Sony Eyes March Launch of PSP in U.S. and Europe

Sony Corp. will likely launch its new PlayStation Portable hand-held game
console in North America and Europe in March, a top executive said on
Wednesday.

Sony has previously only said it will start selling the PSP, which can also
play movies and music, in Europe and North America between January and
March.

The company launched the PSP on Dec. 12 in Japan, where it sells for 19,800
yen ($190). It shipped about 510,000 units by Dec. 31 and aims to ship 3
million units worldwide by March 31.

"It will probably be March," Sony Computer Entertainment (SCE) president
and CEO Ken Kutaragi told reporters at a gathering of business executives,
responding to a question on when it would start selling the PSP in the U.S.
market.

A spokesman at SCE, the company's game arm, said it would be giving a
presentation on the PSP to reporters in Las Vegas later in the day at a
site close to a Consumer Electronics Show.

"We'd like to launch in Europe during March as well. You've got Easter,"
Kutaragi said, referring to the Easter holidays in late March.

Sony hopes to pose a serious challenge in the portable game market to
Nintendo Co. Ltd., which helped to pioneer the format with its Game Boy
products.

Nintendo launched its latest handheld model, the Nintendo DS, in the United
States on Nov. 21 and in Japan on Dec. 2.

It expects launch the DS in Europe in March and aims to ship 5 million
units of the gadget - which is the size of a paperback book with two
screens and a wireless connection - worldwide by March 31.

Kutaragi said sales of the PSP were very strong but that it would be a

challenge for Sony to beat its 3 million unit shipment target due to
difficulty in procuring enough key components such as advanced
semiconductors.

'Snake Eater' Combines Rambo, 007

Don't let a funny title like "Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater" fool you -
this latest PlayStation 2 offering from Japanese video game guru Hideo
Kojima is serious fun.

Whether I was wading through the squishy muck of an alligator-infested
swamp or breathlessly lunging through a forest to dodge arrows from an
invisible enemy, "Snake Eater" is a varied, addictive game that's equal
parts Rambo action and James Bond gadgetry.

Set in the 1960s during the height of the Cold War, you play as an American
superagent with various codenames, such as Naked Snake and, later, Snake
Eater.

Your task: infiltrate the Soviet Union and rescue a top scientist from the
clutches of a clan of rebels bent on creating a next generation of nuclear
tank that could tip the scales of war in Mother Russia's favor.

There's plenty of opportunity for all-out action during a series of
escalating battles with "bosses." These top evildoers put up quite a fight
in innovative ways. One boss, for example, leaps from tree to tree,
shooting you with a crossbow. Worse, special camouflage makes him invisible
most of the time.

You'll spend as much time watching "Snake Eater" as you will playing it.

The $50 game from Konami Digital Entertainment-America has hours of
involving cinematics between missions that drive the twisted plot forward.
Some might complain that these filmic interludes get in the way (this is a
video game, not a movie, after all), but they're used effectively,
dispensing key details in a well-crafted story.

The action can be frenetic, but overall success hinges on not being spotted
by the myriad security patrols and sniffer dogs.

Ducking in the shadows and crawling in the tall grass is certainly one way,
but wearing the right camouflage is important, too. You'll always know how
hidden you are with the convenient "camo index" always showing how well
Snake blends into the surroundings.

Survival skills also come into play. "Snake Eater" takes a more realistic
approach to health and vitality than many games, where health packs often
magically appear.

You have to hunt and forage for sustenance, gathering nature's bounty,
which includes crabs, pythons and mushrooms. Be careful: raw meat
eventually rots, and some things you find may be poisonous.

If you forget to eat and drain your stamina, your groaning stomach should
serve as a nagging reminder that you've got the munchies. Staying full not
only keeps your gut quiet: you can aim weapons better.

Stamina isn't the only factor. You have a health meter that shortens with
every incoming bullet or snake bite. Again, though, there are no magic
cure-alls. You'll have to manually patch wounds like broken bones or burns
using ointments, bandages and sutures.

Better yet, save the game, turn off your PS2 and do something else for a
while. When you return, you'll find Snake is well-rested and patched up.

There are many other excellent games in the so-called action-stealth genre,
including "Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell." Few, however can match the likeable
characters, interesting story and unique style of "Snake Eater."

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

One Year After Law, Spam Still Out of the Can

The nation's first law aimed at curtailing junk e-mail earned a mixed
report card after a year on the books as few spammers faced legal action
and recent surveys showed that spam makes up an even larger proportion of
online messages.

Signed into law Dec. 16, 2003, the Can-Spam Act made it illegal to falsify
the "from" and "subject" lines of e-mail solicitations. It also required
senders of bulk e-mail to include a working "unsubscribe" link in their
messages and to honor consumers' requests to be taken off their mailing
lists. The law doesn't allow individual e-mail users to sue spammers - an
omission decried by anti-spam activists - but it did open the door for
state attorneys general and ISPs to mount a legal offensive.

The nation's big four e-mail providers - America Online, Microsoft, Yahoo
and Earthlink - were among the most ardent supporters of the law, and
wasted no time using the new provisions. In March, the four firms fired
off a barrage of lawsuits targeting some of the most prolific spammers on
their respective networks. The providers announced another round of suits
in October.

On the criminal front, a Virginia jury in November recommended a nine year
jail term for a North Carolina man who became the first ever person
convicted for felony spamming. The man was convicted under Virginia's spam
law, which is similar to the federal legislation but with stiffer
penalties.

"We've seen great progress made," said Sen. Conrad Burns (R-Mont.),
Can-Spam's original sponsor in Congress. "It's been a great first step, and
as we look ahead it's important that the [government] utilizes the tools in
place to ... effectively stem the tide of this unwanted burden."

Still, through all the courtroom activity and the media attention it
generated, spam levels rose in 2004, by almost all accounts. At the

beginning of 2003, spam accounted for about 50 percent of all e-mail, according to Postini, a Redwood City, Calif.-based anti-spam firm that scans about 400 million e-mail messages a day for its clients. By the time Can-Spam passed at the end of 2003, that figure had grown to roughly 75 percent. Throughout 2004, spam accounted for 75 to 80 percent of all e-mail, said Chris Smith, Postini's senior director of product marketing.

Denver-based MX Logic reported similar numbers, saying spam accounted for roughly 77 percent of the messages it scanned in 2004. In December 2003, the month before Can-Spam took effect, MX Logic reported that spam accounted for 67 percent of messages. MX Logic also tracked the number of spam messages that were complying with Can-Spam's extensive labeling rules and found that only about 3 percent of them met the law's requirements.

John Levine, author of "The Internet for Dummies" and operator of a small ISP in Trumansburg, N.Y., said the figures are damning. "It [Can-Spam] didn't work. It's been utterly useless. I haven't seen spam decline. I haven't seen spammers even make nominal efforts to comply with Can-Spam," Levine said. "They clearly don't think they'll be caught."

But Michael Osterman, president of Osterman Research Inc., a Black Diamond, Wash.-based research firm that specializes in the e-mail and instant-messaging industry, said the failure really isn't the fault of lawmakers.

"As a law it's pretty well written. The problem is that spam is almost like drugs - a law isn't going to have an effect. This whole spamming industry is very shadowy," Osterman said. The underlying technology of e-mail makes it extremely easy for spammers to hide their identities by using dozens of tricks, including sending messages from the computers of innocent Internet users who've had their computers compromised by viruses.

As a result, most of the e-mail industry has turned its attention toward technology, rather than litigation, as the primary means for combating spam, Osterman said.

Dave Baker, vice president of law and public policy at Earthlink, said that despite Earthlink's aggressive use of Can-Spam, technological solutions to the spam problem remain the company's main focus.

"You've got to stop [spam] from getting to the customers' machines. If you're suing a spammer, you're going after them for damage that's already been done," Baker said. "The biggest single element remains technology solutions. None of these companies are relying solely on litigation."

Each of the four major e-mail providers is involved in a nationwide effort to develop e-mail "authentication" technology that would make it harder for spammers to disguise their messages.

And while Can-Spam may be a failure so far from the standpoint of consumers, whose inboxes haven't gotten any cleaner in the year since the law passed, that doesn't mean it's having no effect, said Anne Mitchell, executive director of the Institute for Spam and Internet Public Policy.

"It's given prosecutors some very good tools, and if they wield them properly they can be successful," Mitchell said. "It was never about making spammers stop, it was about making what they were doing illegal so we could force them to stop. There's never 'instant anything' when you pass a new law. Look at any of the civil rights laws - it's not like they passed and suddenly we had a utopian society."

The lone bright spot in the fight against spam appears to be America Online. In December, the nation's largest e-mail provider reported a drop-off both in the volume of e-mail hitting its network and in the amount of spam delivered to users' inboxes in 2004. AOL fielded 1.6 billion e-mail messages in 2004, down from 2.1 billion in 2003, which AOL attributes almost entirely to a decrease in the amount of spam hitting its network.

"We think the primary reason that spam is down on the service is because of our spam filtering, but we also absolutely believe that the federal Can-Spam law has had a deterrent effect," AOL spokesman Nicholas Graham said. He pointed out that AOL is based in Virginia, home to the nation's stiffest anti-spam law and first convicted spam felon.

Graham acknowledged that AOL has no way of measuring what portion of the drop-off can be attributed to legislative efforts. And if the laws have scared some spammers away from AOL, the effect hasn't carried over to the online population at large, Postini's Smith said. "It's quite possible that that's only true about the AOL domain. We're not seeing that trend on a whole across the Internet."

Yahoo, Earthlink and Microsoft have not released end-of-year spam statistics.

Tim Murtaugh, a spokesman for Virginia Attorney General Jerry W. Kilgore (R), said while the effects may not have trickled down to users yet, the state and federal laws will eventually take their toll on spammers.

"The people out there who are the spam kingpins, I'm certain that they're aware of what we're doing here. I'm sure it will have at least a psychological impact in that they know we're serious," Murtaugh said. "We predict that it will make people have second thoughts. I don't think they ever thought what they were doing was going to land them in jail."

'Spam King' to Stop Invading Computers

Under an agreement with the Federal Trade Commission, a man known as the "Spam King" will stop infecting computers with advertising programs until a federal lawsuit against him is resolved.

Sanford Wallace and his companies, SmartBot.net Inc. of Richboro, Pa., and Seismic Entertainment Productions Inc. of Rochester, are required by the agreement to send online ads only to people who visit their Web sites.

The government says Wallace used spyware to infiltrate computers, overwhelming them with ads and other programs. Then, he tried to sell programs he claimed would fix the problems. The government said the remedies do not work.

"The commission does believe this is great relief for consumers until the matter is ultimately resolved in the courts," said Laura Sullivan, a lawyer for the FTC. "This provides wonderful protection for consumers in the interim."

No trial date has been set.

Spyware programs monitor which Web sites a consumer visits and some

redirect users to different sites. This can make computers extremely
sluggish and often causes them to crash.

U.S. District Judge Joseph DiClerico issued a temporary restraining order
against Wallace in October to prevent him from sending ads. Hearings on
that order planned for this week were canceled because the agreement made
them unnecessary.

Wallace has said he is being persecuted because of his past involvement in
junk Internet mailings.

He headed a company called Cyber Promotions in the 1990s that sent as many
as 30 million junk e-mails daily to consumers, earning him the nicknames
"Spam King" and "Spamford." He left the company after lawsuits from America
Online and CompuServe.

Wallace moved to Las Vegas last summer. He recently shut down a nightclub
he ran in Rochester and placed Seismic Entertainment, the company that ran
it, in bankruptcy.

Court Rules on Music Downloader IDs

A second U.S. appeals court ruled Tuesday that the recording industry can't
force Internet providers to identify music downloaders under a disputed
copyright law.

The decision doesn't significantly affect the industry's continuing
campaign to sue Internet users.

The 2-1 ruling by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit
in St. Louis affirms another appeals court's decision in Washington in
December 2003. Both courts ruled against efforts by the Recording Industry
Association of America, the trade organization for the largest labels, to
compel Internet providers to identify customers accused of illegally
distributing songs over the Internet.

In the Missouri case, judges said that Charter Communications Inc., one of
the nation's largest Internet providers, wasn't responsible for 93 of its
customers allegedly trading 100,000 copyrighted music files across the
Internet and shouldn't have been compelled to identify them under the 1988
Digital Millennium Copyright Act.

The appeals court said Charter's role was "confined to acting as a conduit
in the transfer of files through its network."

Since the earlier ruling, the music industry has filed civil lawsuits
nationwide against "John Doe" defendants, based on their Internet
addresses, then worked through the courts to learn their names. That
process is more complicated - and more expensive - for the record labels.

The RIAA said it will continue to sue thousands of people it accuses of
illegally sharing music. "Our enforcement efforts won't miss a beat,"
spokesman Jonathan Lamy said.

In a dissent, Circuit Judge Diana E. Murphy complained that the rulings
prevent copyright holders from easily protecting their works and said
repercussions were "too easily ignored or minimized." She wrote that the

industry's practice of filing lawsuits against anonymous defendants was "cumbersome and expensive."

Microsoft To Unveil Anti-Spyware Beta

Microsoft is likely to release a first iteration of its anti-spyware software Thursday, and make the tool available for beta testing.

The information on the beta release was made public when an internal memo was leaked to Windows enthusiast site Neowin Web, according to news reports.

The memo notes that the release has been christened "Atlanta," and already has been distributed within Microsoft. It is unclear whether the software will be released as a public beta or tested by a select external group.

Microsoft commented in December that it would create an anti-spyware beta to be released sometime in January as part of its acquisition of Giant Company Software.

With the success of Mozilla's Firefox browser, combined with widespread grumbling about security concerns with Microsoft's Internet Explorer, many have theorized that Microsoft would become more aggressive in beefing up its browser protection.

"Microsoft has realized that to compete, it has to show how much attention it's paying to security," Yankee Group analyst Laura DiDio told NewsFactor. "The company is constantly working on security, but you'll see them become more proactive about creating software around the issue."

Spyware has become a scourge for Internet users, with much more attention being paid to the problem as identity theft rates rise.

Despite a public comment about an anti-spyware product in the works, Microsoft has not been vocal about software development around spyware and viruses.

However, the company is expected to make announcements this year about several security-related packages and tools.

According to news reports, Microsoft partners have been informed about an upcoming security subscription service code-named "A1" that could be an anti-spyware and anti-virus bundle. The service would allow users to keep up with frequently occurring threats like viruses and worms with greater ease.

"The market for security products right now is very active, which is understandable, given the amount and level of threats," said DiDio. "So, it's not surprising that Microsoft will attempt to make a bigger impact in the year ahead."

Microsoft Offers Virus-Removal Programs

Microsoft Corp., whose popular Windows software is a frequent target for Internet viruses, is offering a free security program to remove the most dangerous infections from computers.

The program, with monthly updates, is a step toward plans by Microsoft to sell full-blown antivirus software later this year.

Microsoft said Thursday that consumers can download the new security program from the company's Web site - www.microsoft.com - and that updated versions will be offered automatically and free each month. It will be available starting Tuesday.

Also, Microsoft offered Thursday a free program to remove "spyware," a category of irritating programs that secretly monitor the activities of Internet users and can cause sluggish computer performance or popup ads.

Microsoft said the virus-removal program will not prevent computer infections and was never intended to replace the need for traditional antivirus software, such as flagship products from McAfee Inc. or Symantec Corp.

But a senior Microsoft executive confirmed the company's plans to sell its own antivirus software, which would compete against programs from McAfee, Symantec and others.

Microsoft purchased a Romanian antivirus firm, GeCAD Software Srl., for an undisclosed amount in 2003. Industry rivals expect Microsoft's formal entry into the market as early as the spring.

"We will have a stand-alone antivirus product that is one of the things you can buy from Microsoft, but we're not announcing anything today," said Rich Kaplan, vice president for Microsoft's security business and technology unit.

The offers of free virus- and spyware-removal tools were intended to convince consumers that Microsoft is working to improve its software's security, Kaplan said.

Microsoft and other companies occasionally have offered separate programs to disinfect specific viruses. Microsoft promised its new removal tool will target a variety of infections and will be updated each month to recognize new ones.

Microsoft is sensitive to criticism about the susceptibility of its Windows operating system software to computer viruses. It has responded by tightening security for its popular Outlook e-mail software and improving the protective firewall utility for Windows. But its reputation largely has hinged on consumers' effective use of antivirus products and other security programs outside Microsoft's control.

Microsoft has proceeded more cautiously in recent years as it moves to compete against its one-time partners. European antitrust regulators last year fined the company $613 million over charges it abused its software monopoly. Microsoft is operating under restrictions from a U.S. antitrust settlement with the Bush administration until 2007.

Kaplan encouraged consumers to buy updated antivirus software from vendors such as Symantec and McAfee. He also expressed confidence that an industry organization formed to share details between Microsoft and leading antivirus companies about virus outbreaks would survive Microsoft's decision to compete directly against those same businesses.

Antivirus vendors have warned investors about the fallout as Microsoft

enters the market. McAfee, for example, said in its most recent annual report that its own products could become "obsolete and unmarketable" if Microsoft were to include antivirus protection in Windows software.

A Symantec executive, Vincent Weafer, said Microsoft's success as an antivirus company at Symantec's expense was not guaranteed. Weafer noted that some leading security companies have decades of specialized experience and skilled researchers.

"This is an area we certainly think we can differentiate ourselves from Microsoft," Weafer said. "We've worked hard over the years to build trust with customers."

Microsoft disclosed last month that it planned to offer software to remove spyware programs that are secretly running on computers. But in a shift from past practice, Microsoft said it may charge consumers for future versions of the new protective technology, which Microsoft acquired by buying a small New York software firm.

Kaplan said the free version of Microsoft's new spyware-removal software will expire July 31 and pricing for future versions is still undecided. Rival anti-spyware tools, such as Lavasoft Inc.'s popular Ad-Aware product, offer similar functions to Microsoft's, and many are free.

New Skulls Trojan Targets Cell Phones

An updated variant of the Skulls Trojan horse comes disguised as a new version of the Macromedia Flash player to fool users of mobile phones running the Symbian operating system.

Skulls.D disables applications needed to remove it, drops the Cabir.M worm onto phones, and informs users that they have been infected by displaying a full-screen flashing skull, says Mikko Hypponen, director of antivirus research at F-Secure in Helsinki, Finland.

Once users download and install the program, it will overwrite applications designed to either fight or remove it. Infected users are also unable to browse their file system or install new programs, forcing them to reset their phone to its default factory conditions.

F-Secure issued an alert on its Web site this week after receiving reports of infected phones from two users, Hypponen says.

People most likely to be hit by Trojan horse programs such as Skulls are typically users who like to download new software either from Symbian freeware Web sites or peer-to-peer networks, according to Hypponen. "Users who are really at risk are those looking for pirated software," he says.

The Cabir.M worm overwrites all short-range Bluetooth radio applications so that infected handsets, once booted, constantly scan for other Bluetooth-enabled devices and send a corrupt file.

Users are asked if they want to install the file. If they accept, the Bluetooth applications on their phones are immediately overwritten, and their handsets then attempt to pass on the file to other Bluetooth devices in the vicinity.

"Most people find out that they've been affected by the Cabir worm when the battery life of the phones falls dramatically, to about a half day instead of the average three days," Hypponen says.

Asked if the various Trojan horses, worms, and viruses that began to affect smart phones earlier last year were all created and contained in the labs of antivirus companies such as F-Secure, Hypponen says "absolutely not."

In an interview late last month with the Associated Press news agency, Graham Cluley, a senior technology consultant with London-based Sophos, was quoted as saying that his company had seen no reports of mobile phone users experiencing malware in their daily use, and that the only reports it had seen documented were of "antivirus researchers sending them to each other in their labs."

"Most of the cases we have come across are from real users in the field," says Hypponen, whose company, F-Secure, develops and markets antivirus software. "We have meanwhile collected reports from users in nine countries."

Hypponen says that although malicious programs aimed at new smart phones are not yet a huge problem, "they are a problem, and they're going to get a whole lot worse."

Adobe Unveils Acrobat 7.0

Adobe Systems is delivering the latest iteration of its Acrobat software for creating PDF files and also is introducing a new reader that includes a beta version for the Linux operating system.

The company, which created the widely accepted portable document format (PDF), is touting Acrobat 7.0 as a product that improves on previous versions by letting users assemble documents from multiple sources, create intelligent business forms, and collaborate on projects inside and outside the firewall.

Adobe Reader 7.0, with support for Linux, gives creators of PDF documents more options in the ways users can interact with them - a development viewed as an important component of Adobe's effort to maintain its grip on the future of shared documents. Among other changes, readers can review and add comments to PDF files.

With previous versions of Acrobat, document authors could create PDF files and distribute them to an unlimited readership that used the freely distributed Acrobat reader program to view them. Allowing the reader to interact with the document in any way, however - make comments, for example, or view 3D images - had required the purchase of a different software package.

Acrobat 7 comes in two versions: The professional edition lists for US$449; the standard package sells for $299. Registered users of earlier Acrobat software can upgrade at a lower fee.

In a related announcement, Adobe introduced the LiveCycle Policy Server, designed to provide protection for business customers requiring document confidentiality, privacy and accountability inside and outside the firewall.

LiveCycle Policy Server is integrated with Acrobat 7 and is a component of Adobe's Intelligent Document Platform for creating and handling PDFs in the enterprise.

Adobe LiveCycle is a server platform that automates document processes. Based on Java 2 Enterprise Edition and XML, the software can be integrated into enterprise infrastructures by providing Java APIs and support for Web services protocols.

Adobe LiveCycle runs on IBM WebSphere and JBoss. Support is planned for BEA WebLogic in the first half of 2005.

Commodore Computer Brand Sold

The company that owns the famed Commodore computer brand has been sold to Yeahronimo Media Ventures, a Beverly Hills, California, digital music distributor.

Tulip Computers, based in Amersfoort, Netherlands, agreed to sell its subsidiary Commodore International for $32.6 million, in a letter of intent announced Wednesday. The deal gives Yeahronimo Media Ventures, founded in July by SATXS Communications and Yeahronimo NV, control over the Commodore brand that has a long history of computer-related products.

Among the most popular products released by the former Commodore International Ltd. was the Commodore 64, an early personal computer introduced in 1982. Commodore International Ltd. filed for bankruptcy in 1994.

With the acquisition, Yeahronimo plans to continue offering digital media devices that Commodore International has sold in Europe, said Mike Freni, president of Yeahronimo Media Ventures. In July, Commodore International announced a line of digital music players under the Mpet brand and USB devices under the Fpet brand; and in November, it began selling its C64 Direct-to-TV game device in the United States.

But Freni wouldn't rule out resurrecting the Commodore brand of PCs. "We leave that still open," he said. "We have not made a decision yet, but we have a right to do so."

The acquisition of the digital media device maker is a good fit for Yeahronimo in its role as a digital media distributor, Freni said. Yeahronimo markets software that allows copyright owners to distribute digital media content to customers. It counts several major music labels among its partners.

Since it was founded, Yeahronimo has also focused on creating a digital media player and viewer and on distributing digital music and sports events. Commodore "fits perfectly with our strategy," Freni said.

Freni expects the acquisition to be completed in about three weeks.

Yeahronimo had previously obtained the rights from Tulip Computers for music, games, and digital distribution of movies through the CommodoreWorld portal and for online sales of Commodore hardware.

Hitachi Plans 500-Gigabyte Hard Disk, Largest Ever

Hitachi Ltd. said on Tuesday it is seeking to push the limits of data storage with smaller stamp-sized disks for handheld gadgets and vastly higher-capacity drives that can store up to 100 films.

Hitachi, the world's No. 2 maker of hard drives, is looking to propel its 3.5-inch line of drives commonly used to store desktop computer files into new markets for storing massive quantities of data captured by personal video recorders.

But instead of the 40 hours of video, on average, that a standard 80-gigabyte hard-drive might store in a Tivo-type digital video recorder, the new drives can hold 200 hours - half a terabyte, or more than 500 billion bits of data.

"This is actually quite an exciting time," Bill Healy, Hitachi's head of storage products marketing, said in an interview detailing the company's storage technology plans.

The new drive will be available to electronics manufacturers in the first quarter. Hitachi was previously the first to deliver a 400-gigabyte, or billion byte, disk drive.

The Japanese electronics makers also said it plans to offer a smaller version of its 1-inch Microdrive that takes up one-fifth less space, consumes less power, and can hold eight to 10 billion bytes of data.

The product uses the same-sized one-inch disks but need less surrounding packaging. More than 5 million of the existing line of Microdrives have shipped in products ranging from digital cameras to music players to video cameras.

The smaller drive, a baby Microdrive, is nicknamed "Mikey." It is the first extension of the line in five years. IBM invented the Microdrive but sold its hard drive business, including the Microdrive line, to Hitachi, in 2003.

The new 1-inch drives promise to allow electronic gadget makers to add capabilities to cellphones for storing entire encyclopedias or recordings of TV broadcasts, Healy said, adding that the Mikey will ship in the second half of 2005.

The drives both tap and, to a real extent, enable the rise of devices that can play back both video and music in ever smaller devices. Hitachi's push into digital entertainment markets seeks to capitalize on the multiplying number of products which use hard disks to store electronic data, from automobiles to living rooms.

"Now we can start counting on our hands and toes the number of hard drives that will be in our homes," Healy said.

Downloader.GK 'Worst Trojan of 2004'

The Downloader.GK Trojan was named as the worst piece of malicious code of 2004, according to Spanish anti-virus firm Panda Software.

Downloader.GK infects Internet users who unknowingly visit Web sites that were designed to spread the Trojan.

"We offer users a free anti-virus scanner tool that they download from our Web site," Panda Software spokesperson Javier Merchan. "We use the results from these scans to rate the top viruses, worms and Trojans."

Downloader.GK was responsible for 14 percent of all attacks on computers detected by Panda Software last year - more than double the attacks of any other virus this year.

When Internet users visit a Web site containing Downloader.GK, they are enticed to install a specific ActiveX application, which secretly installs spyware and adware on their systems.

2004 was the first year that a Trojan topped Panda's annual threat list. In addition, four out of the top 10 threats that Panda tracked in 2004 were Trojans.

Trojans are malicious programs that do not spread on their own, unlike viruses or worms.

Below are the remaining top 10 threats that Panda tracked, followed by the percent of attacks for which they were responsible.

2. Netsky.P (6.92 percent)

3. Sasser.ftp (4.97 percent)

4. Gaobot.gen (4.31 percent)

5. Mhtredir.gen (4.22 percent)

6. Netsky.D (3.98 percent)

7. Downloader.L (3.56 percent)

8. Qhost.gen (3.48 percent)

9. Netsky.B (3.45 percent

10. StartPage.FH (3.34 percent)

EBay, Intel Launch Recycling Initiative

EBay Inc. and Intel Corp. launched a recycling program Thursday to motivate Americans to safely dispose of mounting piles of used computers and other electronic gadgets.

U.S. consumers retire or replace roughly 133,000 personal computers per day, according to research firm Gartner Inc. EBay lists roughly $2.5 billion worth of new and used computers every year, as well as $2.5 billion worth of consumer electronics such as cellular phones, gaming equipment and hand-held computers.

But because relatively few people are willing to pay for professional recycling, and many don't want to dispose of hard drives that contain personal data, machines often end up in basements, garages and spare bedrooms. If improperly disposed, PCs can leak a plethora of toxins into the environment, including lead, cadmium, chromium and mercury.

"You don't want to throw them out, and you don't know what to do with them," said eBay chief executive Meg Whitman, who launched the "Rethink" initiative at the annual International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

The effort is centered around a Web site, at http://ebay.com/rethink, where Americans with unused gadgets can get information on how to get rid of them safely. The site includes a downloadable program that will erase all data from hard drives, ensuring that the owners' financial and other data can't be shared.

Other corporate sponsors include Apple Computer Inc., Gateway Inc., Hewlett-Packard Co., International Business Machines Corp. and Ingram Micro Inc., as well as the U.S. Postal Service, which in some cases will help deliver PCs to eBay drop-off locations or recycling centers.

According to a study commissioned by San Jose, Calif.-based Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, roughly half of all U.S. households have working but unused consumer electronics products. Roughly 400 million gizmos will be thrown out by 2010.

The gizmos, ranging from old MP3 players and home media centers to million-dollar servers at large corporations, can be resold. Or eBay will connect owners with charities, such as educational nonprofits that distribute used PCs to poor communities.

Or consumers can simply dispose of products at nearby recycling centers, which will be listed on the site. Rethink will only link to recyclers that promise not to dump the machines in landfills in developing nations - a growing source of environmental toxins in China and southeast Asia.

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material herein is believed to be accurate at the time of publishing.